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Housekeepers' Chat

533571  
Monday, January 1, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "A New Year's Day Party." Based on Charles Lamb's "Rejoicing Upon the New Year's Coming of Age."

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I've been reading some old-time menus lately, menus from an old cook-book published in 1664 by Robert May, who writes of those "Golden Days of Peace and Hospitality" in merry England.

Here is Mr. May's bill of fare for New Year's Day. The dinner is to be served in two courses. The first course begins with oysters, and continues through fifteen more dishes. Seeing is believing, or you could never make me believe that the ladies and gentlemen of old England ate their way through such a first course as this: Boiled capons, turkeys, "a hash made of twelve partridges," boiled geese, a sirloin of roast beef, "minced pies, ten in a dish, or what number you please," a loin of veal, a patty of venison, a roast pig, two roast geese, and a shoulder of mutton.

"A Second Course for the Same Mess" -- I'm quoting from the old cook-book-- begins with oranges and lemons, followed by sixteen more dishes. Such dishes as a side of lamb, a souced pig, rabbits, ducks, mallards, teels, woodcocks, quails, pigeons, more capons, pickled mushrooms, pickled oysters, sturgeon, turkey or goose pie -- but it's time to stop. In fact, I hope our ancestors learned to stop on New Year's day before they had ever reached the end of the second dinner course.

The other day I showed my treasured cookbook to a friend, and we fell to talking about some of the ancient customs connected with hospitality.

In Europe, in the Middle Ages, my friend told me, keeping open house was a regular custom, but the guest sometimes had to pay for his entertainment. At a good many castles, the host had a pleasant habit of making any stranger who knocked at his gate fight a battle with him -- with lances and swords. If the stranger won, he was asked in and royally entertained. If he lost, he was sent on his way, bruised and battered and supperless.

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Personally, I think it would have been more pleasant to have lost the battle than to have been forced to sit through some of the old-time New Year's dinners. There was another drawback, too, in these romantic old castles. As soon as you went in your host handed you a full length fur-lined coat, with a big hood to pull over your head. Without this wrap, you might have frozen to death while you waited for dinner. The living room was as big as a barn, heated by a fire in the middle of the floor. Comfortable and cozy? Not for the likes of me!

W.H.A.

If this were Thanksgiving day instead of New Year's, I'd give a lengthy discourse on what a lot we have to be thankful for -- in 1934. But since it is New Year's day, I'm going to tell you a story, a story of a unique



party given by the New Year himself. Some of you may have read it -- if you are an admirer of Charles Lamb. Let's begin the tale in the good old way:

Once upon a time, (Charles Lamb doesn't say just when), the New Year gave a party to celebrate his coming of age. Nothing would serve the young spark but he must give a dinner to which all the Days in the year were invited. Covers were laid for three hundred and sixty-five guests at the principal table, with an occasional knife and fork at the side-board for the Twenty-Ninth of February.

All the Festival days were invited, and they were mightily pleased for hadn't they been engaged, time out of mind, in providing mirth and good cheer for mortals? There was a stiff debate as to whether the Fast Days should be invited. Some objected to the presence of such lean, starved guests. But Christmas Day over-ruled the objection. Christmas Day wanted to see how Ash Wednesday would behave, at a jolly New Year's party!

Well, they all met at last, foul Days, fine Days, all sorts of Days, and a rare din they made of it. Some of the Days came in Green, some in White, --but Old Lent and his family were not yet out of mourning. Rainy Days came in, dripping; and sun-shiny Days helped them to change their stockings. Wedding Day was there in his marriage finery, a little the worse for wear. Pay Day came late, as he always does; and Doomsday sent word -- he might be expected.

April Fool's Day took upon himself to marshal the guests, and a wild work he made of it -- shuffling bad Days and good Days together. He had stuck the Twenty-First of June next to the Twenty-Second of December. They looked like a Haycoole beside a marrow-bone.

The lordly young New Year, from the upper end of the table, made a fine speech in which he promised -- Oh, he promised many things. One or two of the days were mean enough to intimate that they didn't believe a word he said, and April Fool whistled to an old tune of "New Brooms."

Order was finally restored, and the New Year went on with his speech, assuring all the Days that they were welcome. He even invited poor Twenty-Ninth of February, sitting all alone at the sideboard, to join the Days at the big table.

Then Ash Wednesday was called upon for a song, and he struck up a carol which Christmas Day had just taught him. Good Friday looked extremely grave, and Sunday held her fan before her face, so that no one would see her smile.

All this while, Valentine's Day kept courting pretty May, who sat next to him, slipping amorous notes under the table until the Dog Days began to be jealous, and to bark and rage exceedingly. April Fool clapped and halloo'd them on, and it was turning into what we might call a wild party, when old Madam Septuagisima, the Mother of Days, diverted the conversation with a tedious tale of her younger days. She rambled on about the Days That Were Gone, the Good Old Days, and on to the Days Before the Flood -- which plainly showed her old head to be a little crazed.

When the party was over, the Days called for their cloaks and their great coats. Shortest Day went off in a deep black fog, that wrapped the little





gentleman all round like a hedgehog. Two Vigils -- so watchmen are called in Heaven -- saw Christmas Day safe home. (They had been used to the business before.) Another Vigil, a stout, sturdy patrol called the Eve of St. Christopher, saw Ash Wednesday in a condition little better than he should be, whipped him over his shoulder, pick-a-back fashion, and so old Ash Wednesday went floating home, singing, "On the bat's back do I fly," and a number of old snatches besides. Longest Day set off westward in beautiful crimson and gold-- the rest, some in one fashion, some in another; but Valentine and pretty May went off together in one of the prettiest silvery twilights a Lover's Day could wish to set in.

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And so I leave you, with an old wish for New Years:

"Good luck and more good luck,  
Hatfuls and sackfuls and three-bushel bagfuls,  
And a little heap under the stairs."

Tomorrow: "Questions and Answers."

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